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Price, 25 Cents.

The Kettle Sings

By

Caroline S. P. Wild



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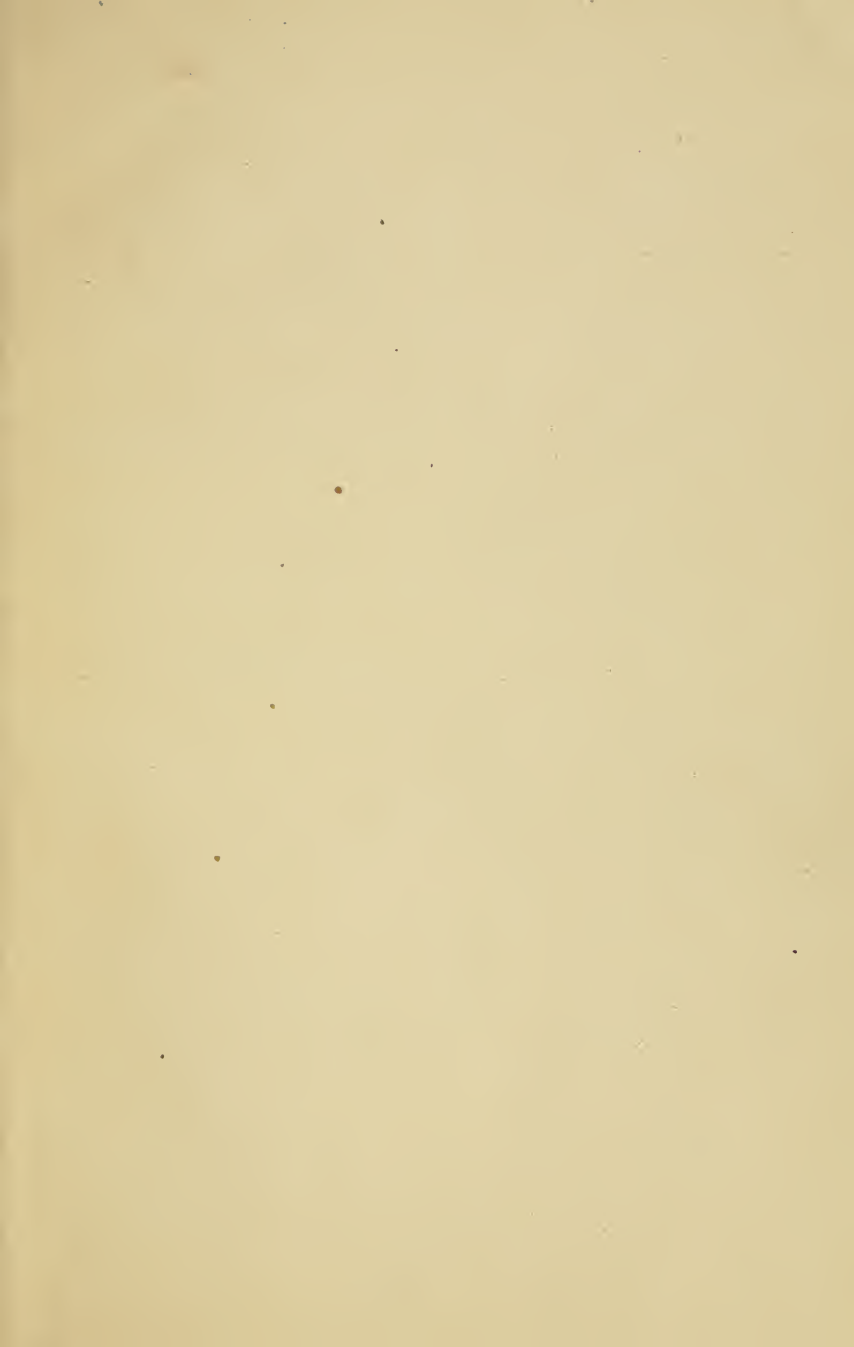
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THE DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY
CHICAGO, ILLINOIS







THE KETTLE SINGS
OR
THE DOMESTIC CONSCIENCE

COMEDY IN ONE ACT
OF TWO SCENES

BY
CAROLINE S. P. WILD

CHICAGO
THE DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY

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The Kettle Sings, or The Domestic Conscience, was first played on the eighteenth of April, 1917, at the Playhouse, Fine Arts Building, Chicago, before the Chicago Woman's Club, with the following

CAST

THE KETTLE
THE MOTOR MAID.....Ernestine Pearce
LUCY POTTS.....Agnes Betts
JOHN POTTS.....William Z. Nourse
MRS. SMYTHKIN.....Helen Nourse
MRS. BYSOM.....Martha K. Wood
MISS FELICIA SCHOOLCRAFT.....Cordelia D. Goodhue
MRS. MARTHA MEANWELL.....Ethel R. McDowell
MRS. FOSTER ADE.....Elizabeth C. Young
MRS. RAFAEL KEATS.....Ella J. Abeel
MRS. PLATO DARWIN.....Mabel C. Thompson
MRS. MARY BLACK.....Helen W. Cooley
TWO DELIVERY BOYS.....Rosa G. Landauer

TIME: Forward of the Present.

PLACE: A Modern Large City.

SCENE: The interior of the Potts' Apartment:—a living room furnished both as library and dining room. There is a fireplace, middle rear, where hangs conspicuous a large Brass Kettle. Either side of fireplace are low book shelves.

A door, left side rear, to street entrance.

A door, right side front, to a bedroom.

A door, right side rear, to kitchen.

On right wall in plain sight is a set of buttons which govern the motor maid. Dining and easy chairs, books and flowers, a picture or two, furnish comforts. The dining table is to the right of middle, rear. A hat rack is near the entrance door.

A writing desk, well furnished, at left, front. A telephone mouthpiece is seen above the book case at left, rear; this is governed by a controlophone set on Lucy's desk.

The "hooting" of the Kettle can be done satisfactorily with a large, double-reed bicycle horn worked by squeezing a rubber bulb.

The "singing" can be done with a small tin fife blown gently with a few varying notes, more or less in imitation of a singing teakettle.

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THE KETTLE SINGS

ACT I, SCENE I.

SCENE. JOHN POTTS, a young man, is reading the morning paper. The motor maid is setting the table for breakfast. The maid has a trim angular figure, is neatly gowned in dark blue with buttons down the back of her dress. She wears a serving apron and a square, white cap. All her motions are precise, mechanical; her features are expressionless. A metal receptacle, set on the breast of the maid's gown, is intended for callers' cards. When not in action the maid stands in stiff position against the wall near the kitchen door.

JOHN. [*Observing that the maid has come to a sudden stop and that she stands stiffly holding out a plate of muffins.*] Lucy!

LUCY. [*Speaking from the bedroom.*] Yes, John?

JOHN. My dear, did you forget to charge our maid last evening? She is anemic, lacks vitality. She is quite run down in fact!

LUCY. [*From bedroom.*] Isn't breakfast served? Has she really stopped?

JOHN. To the best of my masculine observation she has stopped. [*JOHN peers beyond the maid at the table.*] And breakfast is not yet served.

LUCY. [*From bedroom.*] Well! Just a minute! Perhaps I did forget! [*Sounds of hurried movement in the bedroom.*] You remember the package came from mother last evening just as we were turning out the lights [*Sound of banging a bureau drawer*] and, being excited when we found the package was a kettle [*More sound of quick moving in bedroom.*] I probably—forgot—the maid.

JOHN. [*Turning again to his paper.*] Very likely.

LUCY. [*From bedroom.*] John, dear.

JOHN. Yes?

LUCY. [*From bedroom.*] John, I don't like to bother you, but here I am just braiding up my hair; would you mind sparking her yourself?

JOHN. Sparking her!

LUCY. [*From bedroom.*] Yes, you know, charge her first, then touch the first button on the governing board to start her. [*Pause.*] Thank you if you will, dear. The first button, remember.

JOHN. [*Rising but dubious.*] To manage a woman-looking thing by pressing a button! [*He goes to the maid and absent-mindedly begins to fumble with the dress buttons as if fastening a gown; he sees his mistake and pushes the maid towards the governing board.*] It is not enough, I see, to assist the lady, I must do it in the right way. [*JOHN connects and disconnects the wire and presses a button, RIGHT. The maid starts swiftly into action and begins removing the breakfast service, JOHN watching in consternation.*] Stop! Hold there! [*He tries to stop the maid by blocking her way but she, with an abrupt turn, outflanks him.*]

JOHN. [*Holding the maid by main strength.*] For heaven's sake come and stop the creature, Lucy; your female Frankenstein is in reverse, she is clearing off the table! [*He groans and struggles to hold the maid.*] Lucy, come! [*Enter LUCY, dressed in a dainty silk morning frock which she is buttoning as she comes in, the end of her hair braid sticking up; LUCY is in haste, but calm. She consults the governing board, then looks at JOHN and at the maid, amused.*]

LUCY. John, dear, I told you the first button, and the first button for good Americans is at the left. Are you a Chinaman? [*LUCY presses the left button.*] You must have pushed the right button—that one sets her in reverse action. See what happens now. [*The maid starts as JOHN lets go of her and begins again the ordered serving of breakfast.*]

LUCY. [*Watching the maid and patting her own hair into place.*] What wonderful mechanism! She is the latest and best of household blessings.

JOHN. [*Watching the maid and moving his fingers as if pressing buttons, absent mindedly.*] Yes, yes.

[*The maid touches a bell announcing breakfast; JOHN seats LUCY.*]

LUCY. Motor servants are the housewives' relief! Domestic service used to be a constant irritant—like a cinder in your eye, a cause for tears. I am thankful you and I have no foreign temperaments to deal with.

JOHN. No, no temperaments, but we have—Buttons! [*JOHN laughs at LUCY.*] As I see it, domestic ease is now a matter of knowing one's buttons forwards and backwards, and that man who has learned his buttons early—[*Triumphant gesture.*]

LUCY. John, breakfast is served.

JOHN. [*Going to and standing by his own chair, gesticulating.*] I say, Lucy, that man who, by the Montessori method, has learned his buttons early will become, is bound to become, the model husband of his day! [*JOHN seats himself.*]

LUCY. Calm yourself, dear. Have a muffin?

JOHN. [*Waving the muffins away.*] My mood is not for muffins! These—these encounters with dumb waiters raise one above the muffin plane! My courage mounts with occasion—that's quoted:—I could talk familiarly of roaring lions—quoted too, but I feel it! I could press ten buttons for you Lucy, and take the consequences! [*JOHN rises, as if suiting action to words, but LUCY waves him down.*]

LUCY. [*Pouring coffee, which the maid serves to JOHN.*] You know cooking can never be done by the button method—it takes live brains for that. But isn't this community cooking delicious? Everything comes in fresh that should be fresh and hot that should be hot. Have you enough butter?

JOHN. Plenty, thank you. [*The maid, in serving, here drops a spoon on the floor.*]

LUCY. Quick, John! Press the reverse button! The maid has dropped a spoon. [JOHN presses the button, right. The maid stops, bends stiffly, and picks up spoon. JOHN presses the left button. The maid again serves as before. During this episode LUCY and JOHN are absorbed in watching the maid.]

JOHN. [*Seating himself again at table, helps himself to a muffin.*] There is something very appealing about a muffin.

LUCY. [*Mischievously.*] Back again on the muffin plane?

JOHN. I have volplaned to earth. [*Eats his muffin.*] And my inner man yearns for sustenance. [*Reaches for a second muffin.*] My darling!

LUCY. Well?

JOHN. Can this be permanent? [*Sweeps his hand with an inclusive gesture.*] This domestic serenity, this surcease from carking care, this buttered-muffin existence?

LUCY. You mean this release from the shadow of the Intelligence Office? Now that housemaids are furnished as fixtures with most apartments, we have no fear—

JOHN. [*Interrupting.*] Fear that reigned with the tyrant has left by the kitchen door!

LUCY. I meant to say that we have no fear of the new maids' giving notice; they are attached to us, really.

JOHN. Ours is attached—I attached her! Lucy, you do not forget that?

LUCY. [*Laughing merrily.*] Such nonsense! We can never again be serious I do believe. But John!

JOHN. Yes?

LUCY. What do you think my mother meant by sending us that kettle? Let's examine it.

JOHN. Sure enough, the kettle! [*Both JOHN and LUCY rise.*]

LUCY. Finish your breakfast, dear. I have finished. I will bring the kettle.

JOHN. Oh, very well. [*Resumes eating.*] [LUCY takes the kettle from the fireplace and carries it forward, examining it and pulling forth a roll of paper from the nozzle. LUCY holds this paper out to JOHN; he rises and takes both it and the kettle from her.]

LUCY. Have you finished breakfast, John?

JOHN. Yes, quite. [JOHN is examining the paper roll. LUCY presses the reverse button on the governing board; the maid removes breakfast.]

JOHN. [*As LUCY joins him.*] This is a strange bit of doggerel; let me read it to you; it is in your mother's hand. [JOHN reads.]

"This gift, my children, is a worthy dower,
An humble, but a very canny kettle;
Kept ever bright and steaming it will settle
Most problems that beset you, hour by hour."

LUCY. [*With a gesture of dismay.*] "Kept ever bright and steaming!"

JOHN. "Settle your problems hour by hour." [JOHN strikes an attitude, holding the kettle at arm's length.] Farewell, a long farewell to all my problems! Not even a collar button bothers a man nowadays—collar buttons are all patented, all warranted not to furnish swearing excuses. Lucy! [JOHN appeals to her.] You will be my problem now and then, will you not? Life were a tedious tale without one problem! Have a fault or two for my sake, Lucy!

LUCY. [*With a mock curtsy.*] I shall be studious to oblige you—being a woman. But I must find out what the kettle is going to do! [LUCY takes the kettle, pours into it water from a pitcher left on the table, and places the kettle on the crane, starting the fire beneath.]

LUCY. "Keeping the kettle bright and steaming," is going to cost a little for upkeep; where shall we charge that in our budget? [JOHN has taken the newspaper again; he now puts it down and looks on with interest

while LUCY, with an account book which she has taken from the desk drawer, opens it and slowly reads the items.] Rent—food—ice—gas—none of those.

JOHN. Hardly.

LUCY. Clothing, amusements—it isn't going to be an amusement, is it?

JOHN. I really can't predict, with safety.

LUCY. [Still reading.] Entertaining—no, I am certain it means more than that. Telephone—church—charity—it really does not fit in anywhere, does it?

JOHN. How about Home Missions?

LUCY. Dear! Your brilliance illuminates.

JOHN. I should think the kettle might qualify—as a Home Missionary.

LUCY. The very thing; that matter is settled; the Home Missionary on the Hearth! [LUCY, rising, puts the account book away, then turns to JOHN.] John, I think we must be the happiest and most congenial married people in the world; no shade could ever come between us! [Tableau.]

JOHN. It would be a bold shade, my darling, that would venture!

[The kettle sings softly. Door bell. Maid attends.]

JOHN. [Looking at his watch.] It is late; I must be off.

LUCY. Wait one moment; the mail has come. [The maid brings to LUCY a large bundle of mail. There are innumerable postals and one or two letters.]

LUCY. [Taking the mail—turns to JOHN.] Can you wait while I sort the mail? Then I could walk with you as far as the Park—or are you in too much of a hurry?

JOHN. In haste, dear, but no hurry!

LUCY. Which means—you will wait? What a dear you are. [JOHN, settling himself near LUCY, lights a cigar.]

LUCY. [At her desk, sorting the mail.] Look at these postals! Most of them are announcements of meetings, and I couldn't possibly attend half of them!

[*Reserving some, LUCY tears others in two and drops them in the waste basket.*] I mean to keep to a sweet reasonableness about—[*More postals in the basket.*] about my day's appointments. Most women's days, if spread out for inspection, would look like the patchwork quilts their grandmothers made—scraps of this and that pieced together in a sort of wild goose chase pattern.

JOHN. [*Meditatively.*] I guess that is about so.

LUCY. What one woman can do to keep some free time to herself every day I mean to try for. [*Holds up three postals.*] Here are three cards to the same meeting; that's a great waste of postage. [*LUCY places the package of mail on her desk and rises.*] And now I will dress and be with you in a few seconds; will you time me? [*Telephone rings.*]

JOHN. I will answer. [*LUCY goes to the bedroom.*]
JOHN answers through the controlophone.] This is Home 123.

TELEPHONE VOICE. Is Mrs. Potts at home?

JOHN. She is.

TELEPHONE VOICE. This is the Dunetrotters' office. May we speak to Mrs. Potts? [*LUCY comes to JOHN's side, taking the controlophone.*]

LUCY. This is Mrs. Potts.

TELEPHONE VOICE. The Dunetrotters' office, Mrs. Potts. There are hurry notices to be sent out for a meeting next Thursday; the notices are printed but not addressed; they should be mailed this evening; our addressograph is out of order; every one here is up to her eyes in work. Could you, our secretary, do this addressing today?

JOHN. [*To LUCY.*] Not by hand!

LUCY. [*Telephoning.*] You say the addressograph is out of order. Have you address slips to paste on?

TELEPHONE VOICE. Yes, we have those.

LUCY. How many notices are to be sent out?

TELEPHONE VOICE. About seven hundred.

JOHN. [*To LUCY.*] Lucy, I protest! [*LUCY waves him back.*]

LUCY. [*Very firmly, telephoning.*] If you will send the cards and address slips at once, I'll do the best I can with them.

TELEPHONE VOICE. [*Relieved, joyous.*] Thank you so much! So sorry to trouble you with them, but so important, you know! We will send the cards right away. Goodbye.

[*LUCY puts down the controlophone. JOHN comes and stands facing her, his hands in his pockets; he is indignant.*]

JOHN. You women never know how to say "NO." Why don't they fix their addressograph? Why should you be asked to shoulder the entire job? That is a clerk's business, not a secretary's!

LUCY. But, John, the clerk is overworked already, and you see it is my duty to do this. I have accepted the position of secretary, and I must make good in it.

KETTLE. Hoot! [*Both JOHN and LUCY start violently at the unaccustomed sound, but continue absorbed in their discussion.*]

JOHN. [*Shrugs his shoulders.*] Is this path of duty the way to glory, then?

LUCY. John, how provoking you are! You must see that I can't well shift this responsibility.

JOHN. I confess it seems a very foolish undertaking, to me. [*More gently.*] But we can talk it over as we walk along. Will you soon be ready?

LUCY. Dear, I can't go with you this morning, after all. Isn't it too bad? For, if those postals come—

KETTLE. Hoot! [*JOHN and LUCY jump.*]

LUCY. I must go right at them.

KETTLE. H-o-o-o-t! [*Both JOHN and LUCY, startled, are moving towards kettle.*]

LUCY. [*Persisting, louder.*] The committee will have all its final arrangements to make, and I ought to spend every moment—

KETTLE. H-o-o-o-t!

LUCY. Every moment of this day getting those announcements out!

KETTLE. [*Very loud and long.*] Ho-o-o-ot! [*By this time JOHN and LUCY are nervously examining the kettle.*]

JOHN. The Home Missionary evidently disapproves; unless I mistake it, that is a voice of protest against your plan.

KETTLE. H-o-o-o-t!

LUCY. I could never address a card with this going on!

[*JOHN, still eyeing the kettle, has taken a woollen scarf from a chair back. He now advances stealthily towards the fireplace, LUCY falling in behind him. JOHN wraps the scarf around the kettle, covering the spout.*]

KETTLE. [*Muffled.*] Hoot!

LUCY. I think, I think it is a mad kettle, but so long as the postals haven't yet come from the office, [*Brightening.*] will you wait? I will go with you after all. Time me, please. [*LUCY goes into bedroom; JOHN sits, watch in hand; the kettle begins to sing softly; JOHN quietly goes to fireplace and removes the muffler; as he turns around, watch and scarf in hand, LUCY appears, gowned for the street, hatted, and with gloves and parasol. Kettle sings steadily.*]

JOHN. [*Putting away his watch and holding up a warning finger.*] Ssh! You were just three minutes.

LUCY. [*Softly.*] And the kettle is singing!

JOHN. Come along, dear, while it is peaceful; you can't always tell when an active home missionary will again erupt. [*LUCY takes scarf from JOHN, puts it in place, presses a button in the governing board, straightens a chair and rug, and joins JOHN, who has taken his hat and gloves from the rack and is holding the door open.*] There may be wisdom in the vaporings of our kettle!

[*Exeunt JOHN and LUCY; brief moment of quiet. Doorbell. Maid attends. Enter FIRST DELIVERY BOY bringing a large package.*]

FIRST DELIVERY BOY. Package from Dunetrotters'. [*Without looking up, he opens his book, holding it out for signature.*] Sign here, please. [*Pause, in which nothing happens.*] The boy looks up, inspects the maid, grins knowingly, closes the book, and departs whistling "*The Girl I Left Behind Me.*" The maid puts the package on the writing desk and returns to position. Telephone rings. Maid pays no attention. Telephone rings again, violently, and then stops ringing. Doorbell. Maid attends. SECOND DELIVERY BOY enters, bringing a mountain of store boxes.]

SECOND DELIVERY BOY. Packages from Acres! [*He puts the boxes down on a chair near the desk, stage front right, and then looks curiously at the maid.*] Chee! Another o' them new Buzzer-girls! The cops is kickin' on them. [*Sighs, as if tired.*] I'm kickin' on carryin' tons o' boxes back an' forth. [*Chucks the maid under the chin and goes out. Doorbell. Maid attends. Re-enter LUCY. She is bright, as from good exercise. Going to the fireplace, she nods to the kettle.*]

LUCY. [*To the kettle.*] Thanks to you, I have had my good walk.

[*Kettle sings. LUCY takes off her hat, etc., and as the kettle sings softly, LUCY hums with it. She discovers on the desk the Dunetrotters' package.*]

LUCY. Oh, here are the postals; I must get right at them. [*LUCY gives her hat, gloves, etc., to the maid, pressing a service button; the maid carries them to the bedroom, leaves them there and returns to position. LUCY goes to her desk and opens the Dunetrotter package.*]

LUCY. [*Sighing.*] What a pile of work! [*As LUCY is folding the paper and string and arranging her desk work, she turns and discovers the great pile of department store boxes.*] Why! What on earth can these be? I have not ordered goods sent home. [*LUCY is about to investigate the boxes when the telephone rings. LUCY answers through controlophone.*] Home 123.

TELEPHONE VOICE. Mrs. Potts?

LUCY. Yes.

TELEPHONE VOICE. This is the Dunetrotters' office. Our messenger came back saying you had one of the new mechanical maids in your apartment who couldn't sign the book. Have you the postals there all right?

LUCY. Yes, they are here; I am just getting at them.

TELEPHONE VOICE. Very well, then. Thank you. Good-bye.

LUCY. But where can these boxes have come from? [*She starts to investigate. Door bell rings. Maid admits Mrs. SMYTHKIN, who puts her card in the maid's gown and advances to LUCY.*]

MRS. SMYTHKIN. [*A fashionable person, who gushes.*] Dear Mrs. Potts, I hope you will excuse the informality of my call—without a hat, you see. I am your neighbor in the building, Mrs. George Smythkin. It's very distracting, isn't it?—being a bride, I mean. You have so many strangers come to call. I mean to call formally later on; you must really let me be your friend, calling upon me for anything you want, you know. I am the second apartment above; you really must treat me like a sister! I once met your dear mother; wonderful, delightful woman, Mrs. Black; so active, you know; I love to hear her speak! I heard her once on—on—it was about—but I mustn't run on in this way, for I've only come in to get the boxes. [*MRS. SMYTHKIN is looking at the Acres packages.*]

LUCY. Boxes! Oh, are they your packages, then?

MRS. SMYTHKIN. Yes, yes, they are. You see, I took the liberty of having them sent to your apartment—bride's apartment, you know—so natural that boxes should be coming in. And then [*MRS. SMYTHKIN sighs.*] probably *your* husband has not yet begun to scold about little things! [*LUCY waits patiently while MRS. SMYTHKIN draws a long breath.*] It is trifling, isn't it, to worry over bundles? George always says when he sees a few packages coming from Acres or some other store: [*Here*

MRS. SMYTHKIN *imitates "George."*] "What in thunder do women have half the store sent home for? Why don't they *know* what they want and go and get it?" [MRS. SMYTHKIN *resumes her natural tone of voice.*] And it's no use; I tell him over and over that the stores expect to send things out, they *like* to do it; that they have to keep the delivery boys busy. He won't believe me, and I knew you wouldn't mind my saving him one of these unreasonable spells by having the packages come to you. George is gone now, and I will have the elevator boy carry the boxes up for me. [MRS. SMYTHKIN *starts to go, but, as if suddenly inspired, turns to LUCY, who has stood quite patiently listening.*] If you aren't very busy—and you can't have much to do, being a bride—

KETTLE. Hoot! [MRS. SMYTHKIN *starts at the sound and drops the boxes, but proceeds.*]

MRS. SMYTHKIN. I would love to show you some of these little things I picked up yesterday.

LUCY. I have some work I really *must* do.

MRS. SMYTHKIN. [On her way to the boxes, *picking up LUCY's desk scissors as she goes.*] Well, it won't take more than a minute to see these lovely things—I just happened on them—I'd like to show them to you. Now this, [Taking out of a box an elaborate evening gown of the extremest low cut fashion—a short underskirt with long over points hanging to the floor.] Now this, [Holding the gown up to show it off, front and back.] is a beauty. Isn't it a beauty?

KETTLE. Hoot! [MRS. SMYTHKIN and LUCY *both start nervously.*]

MRS. SMYTHKIN. I'm only afraid it's a trifle high at the back of the waist. [She holds the gown up judiciously.] They don't wear backs any more, you know—just a strap. What do you think?

LUCY. I? I really think it is much too low.

MRS. SMYTHKIN. Oh, no, not for present fashion! Don't be a prude at your age! Now, in one of these boxes—[She stuffs the first gown back in its box, lifts

the box off, opens another box.] Oh, yes, here it is—a fancy ball costume, Persian, you know. I thought I'd enjoy a Persian costume, such *wonderful* colors! [*She is exhibiting a hybrid costume with bloomers and sash of exquisite color and texture and spangled bodice of conventional European cut.*] Dear me! I hope I can get George to go sometime in a *Bakst* costume, and I'll wear this. You know, I always thought *Bach* was only a musician, kind of trilly, until I saw the ballet, with all his costumes in it. You see this [*Indicating the hybrid gown.*] is only Persian below; I had this bodice put on because I once read somewhere that Persian court ladies wear bloomers with Parisian bodices, like this, so, when they sit at dinner, they are Persian below the table and European above it. It took my fancy! Isn't this beautiful? Don't you like it?

KETTLE. Hoot! [*Both women are startled.*]

LUCY. I don't believe I do, very well. [*Noting MRS. SMYTHKIN'S disappointment.*] But then, you see, I was brought up on dress reform ideas—everything must be useful and comfortable as well as beautiful. I don't think I could be comfortable—Persian below and Parisian above.

MRS. SMYTHKIN. Oh, of course! Your mother, Mrs. Black, was one of the Dress Reform Leaders! And so you were brought up on those notions—long, flowing lines, outward curves, flat shoes—oh, dear, oh, dear, I never *could* live up to that. [*She puts the boxes together and ties them up.*] If the time ever comes when all the women leave off corsets, and wear things hanging from their shoulders, and go without heels, and never powder their noses, I—well, I simply won't be here then! Now the boy's outside and I'll give him these, and I'm ever so glad to have met you; you're just beautiful, you know, only I wouldn't go in for too much common sense if I were you. Good-bye.

[*Exit MR. SMYTHKIN, who staggers out with the boxes.*]

LUCY. [*Sits at her desk and begins to paste addresses.*] Now I must not have any more interruptions. [*Telephone rings.*]

LUCY. [*Through controlophone.*] Home 123.

TELEPHONE VOICE. Mrs. John Henry Potts?

LUCY. Yes, this is Mrs. Potts.

TELEPHONE VOICE. Mrs. Potts, this is Bluffum's Studio. We are making a specialty of portrait work for this season's brides, and Mr. Bluffum wants particularly to have the pleasure of making a study of *you*. No charge at all, unless you are pleased. We are going to present this year's portraits in an album to the Polytechnic, and it will hardly be complete unless you—

LUCY. [*Interrupts.*] I really haven't time—

TELEPHONE VOICE. Not today? But, may we call again tomorrow. This is a most unusual opportunity!

KETTLE. Hoot!

LUCY. No, do not call me. If I consider the matter favorably, I will call you.

TELEPHONE VOICE. [*Abruptly.*] Oh, very well, good day.

[*LUCY resumes addressing, and then, as if recollecting something forgotten, picks up the controlophone.*]

LUCY. While I am about it, I may as well finish telephoning. [*Through the controlophone.*] Main 645.

TELEPHONE VOICE. 6—4—5 Main.

[*Pause; after delay, central calls.*]

TELEPHONE VOICE. Number, please?

LUCY. I gave you the number.

TELEPHONE VOICE. Number, please?

LUCY. [*Not patiently.*] Main 645.

TELEPHONE VOICE. 6—4—5 Main. [*Pause, delay.*]

LUCY. [*Waiting, taps the desk with her pencil, then calls again, impatiently.*] Will—you—please—give—me—Main 645?

TELEPHONE. Bzzzz! [*Busy signal.*]

[LUCY, disgusted, puts down the controlophone and goes on with the addressing. Door bell. Maid admits MRS. BYSOM. LUCY is absorbingly at work, and does not notice MRS. BYSOM's entrance. MRS. BYSOM is showily gowned, and wears a jaunty air. She has a large, black silk scarf on her left arm. Glancing keenly about, she takes a calling card impressively from her purse and slips it into the maid's gown front. Maid returns to wall position. MRS. BYSOM approaches LUCY.]

MRS. BYSOM. Ahem! Mrs. Potts? I hope I don't intrude? [LUCY rises and looks expectantly at MRS. BYSOM, who continues.] I see you don't recall me—MRS. BYSOM, MRS. GENEVIEVE BYSOM. I placed my calling card in your maid's keeping. I know your dear mother well; who doesn't know Mrs. Black? Such a grand woman—such a noble woman! Absolutely a grand woman if ever there was one!

LUCY. You're very kind. [LUCY offers a chair.]

MRS. BYSOM. Oh, not at all! I have come to ask a favor of you, Mrs. Potts.

LUCY. What is it?

MRS. BYSOM. Have you, by any chance, on your bookshelves—I see you have many books—have you a copy of Butler's Precious Pearls of Wisdom? It is a publication for children.

LUCY. I have no children and no children's books. I am sorry.

MRS. BYSOM. [Hastily interrupts, drawing forth an agent's sample folder from a bag hid beneath her silk scarf.] Of course, you are sorry; every one is sorry if this wonderful chance has passed her by! Every truly cultured woman I have ever approached with the offer I am about to make to you tells me she wouldn't think of missing the opportunity to have this marvelous compilation, absolutely marvelous, in her library! [LUCY starts to interrupt, but MRS. BYSOM talks more rapidly.] Our most noted educators, fourteen of our absolutely most noted educators, have given years of their time to col-

lecting data for this work. Let me read you a few of their names.

LUCY. But, my dear Madam—I—

MRS. BYSOM. Oh, pray don't mind taking my time. I am only too glad to present this unparalleled, absolutely unparalleled, chance to refined people. They alone are the ones who appreciate it; it is only to them I turn! But may I read to you the names of the distinguished editors? [*Reads.*] "Dr. M. Burry Cutler, Ph.D., LL.D." You know him, of course! "Dr. James Gordan Starr, D.D., LL.D., Ph.D."—wonderful man! "Dr. Andrew Pax," president of—but you know all about *him*; *his* name alone would sell the book, absolutely sell the book, at double the price. Just examine the quality. [*She hands the sample book to LUCY.*]

LUCY. But, my dear woman, I have no use for these volumes; my husband and I are specializing in books and we—

MRS. BYSOM. [*Interrupting.*] The very reason, absolutely the very reason, why you should have this book of general information on your specialized book shelves. Your children will rise up and call you to account if you *don't have it*.

LUCY. But I do not wish the book. You are wasting your time and mine. My means do not allow me to invest in expensive books unless I am certain of using them. [*Kettle sings softly.*]

MRS. BYSOM. [*Taking back the unopened sample book.*] And you are right, quite right, dear Mrs. Potts. I am accustomed to these economies in young housekeepers. We must encourage them in thrift—we must encourage them. [*While talking, MRS. BYSOM pulls from her bag a small bottle with a large curl of hair attached to the cork.*] That is why I carry around with me this delightful little *Curl Quick*—it is a time-saver. And *time is money*, isn't it, Mrs. Potts? And so, in saving *time* wasted by women who curl their hair in the old-fashioned way, I am saving their *money*, am I not?

Now this little *Curl Quick*—that is the name, you see [*She offers the bottle to LUCY.*—is recommended by the famous hair specialist, absolutely the most famous—

LUCY. [*Quite furious, interrupts.*] Mrs. Bysom, this passes all!

MRS. BYSOM. [*Sighing as she drops the bottle into her lap and draws from her sleeve a long purple ribbon with a small silver clasp at the end.*] I see you are not in need of the *Curl Quick*, really not in need of it, but here is a sweet device [*She holds up the ribbon.*] that is simplicity itself and all the rage, absolutely all the rage, in the Smart Set. On the Driveway no woman thinks of appearing without her lapdog on one of these leashes—absolutely not!

LUCY. [*Out of patience, rises.*] Mrs. Bysom, I must request you to leave me! I have on hand matters more important than haircurlers and lapdog leashes! It is unthinkable that such intrusion as this should be possible! I really think peddlers should be prohibited!

KETTLE. Hoot!

LUCY. [*Calms herself, as though warned by the kettle, and looks at MRS. BYSOM, who, with a dejected air, is putting her articles into the bag and preparing to leave.*] Mrs. Bysom, [*MRS. BYSOM forlornly turns to LUCY.*] I beg your pardon; perhaps I am intrusive now, but I want to ask you, is—is not your business a very trying one—going to the homes of all sorts of people and persuading them—[*LUCY speaks most kindly as she perceives MRS. BYSOM to be agitated.*] persuading them to buy what they really do not want?

MRS. BYSOM. [*Painfully tries to control her feelings.*] It's a dog's life, I don't mind telling you, absolutely a dog's life, just a shade better than being on the street! You get yourself up regardless [*She indicates her fine clothes.*] in things you can't afford, because you have to make a good impression; you offer the glad hand to people when you know they will soon want to kill you, absolutely kill you, for taking up their time, offering

them stuff you have learned to reel off a spiel about! [MRS. BYSOM *grows hysterical.*] Ha! Ha! it's a great life, the peddler's, but as peddling's the only thing I can do well, absolutely the only thing, I'd better—[*She falls, fainting, to the floor. LUCY, startled but cool-headed, straightens MRS. BYSOM's limbs, presses a governing board button, whereupon the maid brings water, a towel, restoratives; LUCY chafes MRS. BYSOM's hands until the maid returns, when she bathes MRS. BYSOM's forehead, applies smelling salts, etc.*]

LUCY. I am thankful now for my First Aid training.

MRS. BYSOM. [*Reviving.*] Oh, again! Oh, I wish I were dead! I wish I were absolutely dead!

LUCY. [*Helping MRS. BYSOM to stand.*] You must stay here quietly with me until you feel better.

MRS. BYSOM. No. You're very kind, but I must be going along. [*She shows signs of returning faintness, and sinks into a chair. The kettle sings.*]

LUCY. Do sit still. You shall have a cup of tea. [*Presses button; the maid responds as desired; MRS. BYSOM sits with closed eyes. Telephone rings.*]

LUCY. [*Through controlophone.*] Home 123.

JOHN'S VOICE. Hello, is that you, Lucy?

LUCY. Oh, John, I tried to get you some time ago, but could not make connection.

JOHN'S VOICE. Is everything right with you?

LUCY. Fairly so.

JOHN'S VOICE. How is the Home Missionary?

LUCY. Active.

JOHN'S VOICE. And your postals? Are they finished? [*Here the maid brings the tea tray to LUCY.*]

LUCY. [*Telephoning.*] Excuse me a moment, John, an interruption. Hold the wire, please. [*LUCY sets the tea tray on a small table near MRS. BYSOM, who until now has sat quite listless.*]

LUCY. Please drink this tea, Mrs. Bysom; I am sure it will revive you. [*MRS. BYSOM murmurs thanks and LUCY returns to the telephone.*] Hello, John. Waiting?

JOHN'S VOICE. Yes—how about your postals?

LUCY. I have hardly begun on them!

JOHN'S VOICE. Don't worry over them, will you? I shall be home early and can help you out. We are to be at home this evening, aren't we? No engagement?

LUCY. None but the postals!

JOHN'S VOICE. You ought to have an assistant.

LUCY. I shall count on you.

JOHN'S VOICE. You may. Well, good-bye, my dear. I hope you are enjoying a quiet day.

LUCY. Thank you. Good-bye. [Lucy puts down the controlophone, exclaiming.] A quiet day!

MRS. BYSOM. [With animation.] Now I can repay your kindness to me! I—I couldn't help hearing about the postals. May I, may I—stay and assist you with them? I am quick with my hands. [Eagerly.] Do allow me.

LUCY. Why, thank you. I am only too pleased to accept your offer, if you feel well enough to help me.

MRS. BYSOM. Yes, yes, I do.

LUCY. [Arranging the desk.] Then we will sit here together. [They systematize the work. The kettle sings.]

MRS. BYSOM. Mrs. Potts, I—absolutely—I—feel as if something were speaking to me, telling me things about myself.

LUCY. Perhaps it is the kettle.

MRS. BYSOM. The kettle?

LUCY. Yes; listen. Does it say anything intelligible to you? I am beginning to understand it.

[The kettle sings softly.]

(CURTAIN.)

ACT I, SCENE II.

SCENE. LUCY and MRS. BYSOM discovered at desk as at close of Act I. Several hours have elapsed.

LUCY. [*Piling postals in orderly fashion and setting them aside for mailing.*] All these finished in spite of interruptions! Mrs. Bysom, you are most kind to have helped me so much, but don't stay longer than you have time to spare. I can manage the rest of these, with Mr. Potts' help; this evening.

MRS. BYSOM. [*Smiles at LUCY and shakes her head.*] I really like to do them. Here a'll is restful to me, absolutely restful.

[*Telephone rings. LUCY and MRS. BYSOM laugh.*]

LUCY. Restful—except for the telephone.

[*Telephone rings again.*]

LUCY. [*Putting down her work.*] Telephones neither slumber nor sleep! They should be trained to afternoon naps.

[*Telephone rings violently.*]

LUCY. [*Through controlophone.*] Home 123.

TELEPHONE VOICE. Is Mrs. John Henry Potts at home?

LUCY. This is Mrs. Potts.

TELEPHONE VOICE. This is the Polytechnic Institute. The board of managers, for whom I am speaking, would like to see your name on our membership list. We should like your support. Er—do you and Mr. Potts understand about the Polytechnic?

LUCY. Yes, I think we do.

TELEPHONE VOICE. May we have the pleasure of adding your name to our list?

LUCY. No, I must consider the proposition.

TELEPHONE VOICE. Then we may call again? When shall we call you? Tomorrow?

KETTLE. Hoot!

LUCY. [*With a smiling glance at the kettle.*] No, do not call. I will consider and inform you of the decision.

TELEPHONE VOICE. Oh, very well. Good-bye.

[*LUCY sets to work again. Telephone rings.*]

MRS. BYSOM. [*With an impatient gesture.*] Absolutely!

LUCY. [*Through controlophone.*] Home 123.

TELEPHONE VOICE. Mrs. Potts?

LUCY. Yes.

TELEPHONE VOICE. This is the Daily Inquisitor, Mrs. Potts. Your name has been given to us as one of the young matrons interested in reducing the high cut of women's skirts. Now we would like your opinion in this matter.

LUCY. I haven't formed an opinion.

TELEPHONE VOICE. Well, you would know whether you favored government regulation or local agitation.

LUCY. I think local agitation would very likely follow government regulation.

TELEPHONE VOICE. Ah, Oh! Thank you very much for your valued opinion, Mrs. Potts. Good day.

[*The kettle sings. There is a moment of quiet work. Telephone rings. LUCY sighs, MRS. BYSOM frowns. Both gesture impatiently.*]

LUCY. [*Through controlophone.*] This is Home 123—Mrs. Potts.

TELEPHONE VOICE. Oh, yes, Mrs. Potts, this is the Dunetrotters' office. We find that a few *influential* names were omitted from the list we sent you this morning. Will you take them now by telephone?

KETTLE. Hoot!

[*Door bell. Maid attends.*]

LUCY. Really, you must excuse me. I have already all that I can do to finish the ones first assigned.

TELEPHONE VOICE. Oh, well, all right. Sorry.

[*During this telephone communication MISS SCHOOLCRAFT, MRS. ADE and MRS. MEANWELL have entered,*

left cards with the maid, etc. MRS. MEANWELL now comes forward.]

MRS. MEANWELL. [*Short, sturdy, mannishly dressed and a trifle deaf.*] Lucy, have you learned to control the telephone, or does it control you?

LUCY. [*Rising and hastening to greet her callers.*] I am so glad to see you!

[*Telephone rings. LUCY shrugs her shoulders and makes a despairing gesture.*]

LUCY. Is there a scientific management for telephones?

MRS. MEANWELL. May I answer? [*LUCY hands her the controlophone and busies herself in seating Miss SCHOOLCRAFT and MRS. ADE.*]

MRS. MEANWELL. [*Sternly, through controlophone.*] This is Home 123. If you want Mrs. Potts and have an immediate message for her, tell it quickly. If not immediate, Mrs. Potts is to be reached by telephone between the hours of 8 and 9 a. m. and 5 and 6 p. m. You understand? [*No answer. MRS. MEANWELL waits a second, then puts down the controlophone and seats herself by LUCY, who waits in quiet amusement.*]

LUCY. [*Indicating MRS. BYSOM.*] Mrs. Meanwell, Mrs. Ade, Miss Schoolcraft—my guest, Mrs. Bysom. [*All acknowledge by bows, without rising. LUCY seats herself in the group.*] How nice of you busy people to come at once to welcome me! Mother will be so pleased when she hears it.

MRS. FOSTER ADE. [*Middle aged and kindly.*] We are very curious, you know.

MRS. MEANWELL. [*Solemnly.*] And anxious.

LUCY. Curious and anxious about what?

ALL THREE VISITORS. About you.

LUCY. Curious and anxious and about me! You make me feel quite important! [*The three women exchange significant glances.*]

MISS SCHOOLCRAFT. [*A spinster in spectacles, to MRS. MEANWELL.*] You begin first, Martha, as we agreed.

MRS. MEANWELL. [*To Lucy.*] You are important to us and to all womanhood. It is my earnest hope that I may convince you of that importance.

KETTLE. Hoot! [*All start, and look around for the source of the sound.*]

MRS. MEANWELL. [*Her hand behind her ear.*] I beg your pardon?

LUCY. No, no, Mrs. Meanwell, please excuse the interruption.

MRS. MEANWELL. Well, as I was saying, we older women, your mother's friends, want you to realize the splendid possibilities that lie ahead of you. We have labored [*She sighs.*] through years of unflagging effort, to reform and regenerate society and now we look to you to take up the burden of the day as we lay it down; and so, my dear, we view with anxiety, I may say great anxiety, this marriage you have contracted.

KETTLE. Hoot!

MRS. MEANWELL. [*Half hearing.*] Did you [*Pause.*] say anything?

LUCY. Do forgive the kettle! But, Mrs. Meanwell, what *can* you mean?

MRS. MEANWELL. I mean, dear child, nothing derogatory to your excellent husband, nothing condemnatory of marriage itself except that as an institution it may collide with the unfolding purpose of a great and useful life—your life.

KETTLE. Hoot!

MRS. MEANWELL. I keep fancying I hear an unusual sound!

LUCY. [*Nervously eyeing the kettle.*] But may not the purpose of my life discover itself through marriage and motherhood?

MRS. MEANWELL. It may, it may, but the chances are against it. Too many married women spend their lives in worshipping household gods. [*MRS. MEANWELL sighs and then, abruptly, asks.*] Lucy, do you intend to have children?

LUCY. O, yes indeed [Miss SCHOOLCRAFT and Mrs. ADE appear shocked.] I do, although of course I can't say just how many.

MRS. MEANWELL. We perhaps should not ask *that* of you, dear child, nor that you forego the pleasantly sentimental experience of motherhood. [*Musingly.*] It is still necessary for the race that women bear children—a limited number.

LUCY. And the family then, is it not the very foundation of the social structure? And isn't the conservation of the family a part of the business of being a woman?

MRS. MEANWELL. [*Rises and takes middle of stage.*] The family! a fetch! An ancient superstition long outliving its usefulness! Gradually we are evolving a social state when men and women shall disavow that unit of segregation!

KETTLE. Hoot!

MRS. MEANWELL. Did you say—something, Lucy?

LUCY. [*Eagerly.*] I do want to ask you: What becomes of the children of the future?

MRS. MEANWELL. The children of the future will be the children of the community; the hand, not of a mother but of an expert must in the future rock the cradle—no, no, of course one does not rock cradles nowadays—but you know what I mean!

LUCY. And family life?

MRS. MEANWELL. Family life will be merged in community life; children will be cared for and educated by the community.

LUCY. [*Interrupting.*] And will no little child of the future ever know what it is to be homesick? Mother-sick?

[*The KETTLE sings. The visitors appear to be grieved by LUCY's question.*]

MRS. MEANWELL. Lucy, your emotions cloud your intellect.

LUCY. I cling to the idea of homemaking.

MRS. MEANWELL. Commonplace! Any one can make a home. That was Eve's conception of life before she learned there were things more important than tending the garden of Eden.

[*The KETTLE sings.*]

LUCY. That's just the point—Eve was not a modern, scientific homemaker. If she had been, that garden would have run like clockwork and Eve would still have had time to help Adam name the creatures. She would have had Adam's fig leaf dinner coat ready for him in the cool of the evening before the expected guest arrived, and as for Adam—if he had sprayed his apple trees! [*LUCY laughs merrily.*] But seriously, couldn't home-making and fathering and mothering be reckoned in as real professions? Can't a woman *balance* home life and community life? Can't she? [*LUCY stops, suddenly embarrassed.*] I beg your pardon! I am very inexperienced and idealistic! I think the KETTLE influences me.

MRS. MEANWELL. You are still quite old-fashioned aren't you, my dear? And what has your kettle to do with it all? [*MRS. BYSOM rises. She has been industriously pasting labels, tho' following the conversation keenly. She now hastily stacks the postals and moves towards LUCY with eagerness.*]

MRS. BYSOM. O, Mrs. Potts, I have intruded too long, absolutely too long! The postals are nearly done. I thank you, I thank you for a new idea! I think I shall try keeping house—for Bysom.

LUCY. Why! Mrs. Bysom!

MRS. BYSOM. Yes, you see, I had only the economic independence idea and now I think I have a new light, absolutely a new light. I thank you. [*Gathers her wraps.*]

LUCY. Please don't thank me, it was the kettle that helped you, I'm sure. I hope you will have one singing in your home! You have been so kind to help me! Goodbye. [*MRS. BYSOM bows to all the ladies and again to LUCY. Doorbell—maid attends.*]

MRS. BYSOM. Goodbye! Goodbye! [*Exit.*]

[*Enter, as MRS. BYSOM goes out, MRS. RAFAEL-KEATS and MRS. PLATO-DARWIN, whom LUCY greets cordially.*]

LUCY. O, how do you do Mrs. Keats? And Mrs. Darwin! To think of your making calls! You know these friends? [*Indicating MRS. MEANWELL, MISS SCHOOLCRAFT and MRS. ADE, who nod familiarly. All seat themselves.*]

MRS. ADE. [*Kindly but firmly.*] Lucy dear, we have little time for the frippery of social calls. What we are really come for today is to urge you to take hold of the vast issues of life in the great world and not to bury yourself in the petty routine of family life. I, for one, sadly need your help in a piece of constructive work I am about to undertake. [*She half closes her eyes, scrutinizing LUCY.*] I'm sure you could do it eminently well, if you would.

LUCY. I should like to do what I can.

MRS. ADE. [*Rises and comes forward.*] I am putting a tooth-brush bill through the legislature. May I read it to you? [*All assent. MRS. ADE deliberately takes from her hand bag a large, folded paper, which she impressively opens and, clearing her throat, reads.*] "Whereas"—this is the preamble—"Whereas, it is the inalienable right of every man, woman and child in the state to possess a tooth-brush of his own; and,

"Whereas, it has been clearly demonstrated that every tooth-brush should be constructed to fit the mouth of the individual using it; and,

"Whereas, it is questionable if all individuals, unaided by the state, could find, secure and understand the use of the tooth-brush best fitted and suited to their own particular needs; and,

"Whereas, the health of the body politic is known to be seriously menaced by diseases arising from maladjustment of tooth-brushes to the mouths"— [MRS. ADE turns the page and takes breath.]

MISS SCHOOLCRAFT. [*Interrupting, puts MRS. ADE aside.*] Beautiful, beautiful idealism, Mrs. Ade, but really less important, it seems to me, for Lucy than are the practical matters of school reforms. School Board Reforms! The very mention of them brings a thrill. *There* is a field of battle worthy the stoutest warrior! There, in historic frays, the pick and flower of civic Galahads have gone down to defeat—to defeat, but never to despair. [*She turns to Lucy passionately.*] Lucy, I implore you, give your strength, your time, your splendour of usefulness to *us*. We need you *now*. This is our present problem: Our School Board, as you know, is quite made up of women, able, disinterested women; but we *do* want a *man* among us, we really want a *man*! Where shall we find a *man* who wants a School Board job for life? Come and help us find him, Lucy! If once we interest you in public school affairs, you will never again stagnate in mere domesticity! [*Scornfully.*] Domestic stagnation!

KETTLE. Hoot!

MISS SCHOOLCRAFT. [*Tartly.*] Lucy, how can you allow that rude kettle to interrupt?

LUCY. Do excuse it! [*Lucy hesitates.*] But, do you know, I find in my kettle an inspiration?

MRS. PLATO-DARWIN. [*Imposing, learned, comes forward displacing MISS SCHOOLCRAFT.*] Your kettle an inspiration! *Reductio ad absurdum!* What can an insignificant teakettle have to do with the weightier matters of your corporeal ontology? [*Turns to the other visitors.*] Candor compels the admission that, in my opinion, Lucy is not yet in the full exertion of her powers of cognition. Reality! Actuality! The *Elan vital*! The Apprehension of Synchronous co-existence with other manifestations of *Abstract Being*! These are matters of pure intellection as yet beyond Lucy's *cognitio intuitiva* or her categories of understanding. [*Turning to LUCY.*] Lucy dear, Kant says—[*She sees LUCY about to speak.*] but my dear, "*Videmus nunc per specu-*

lum in aenigmate;" you shall see face to face, you shall receive spiritual illumination, if you enroll yourself in our *Bergsonian Band*, [*She speaks with rapt enthusiasm.*] our little Band of *Serious Seekers after Truth*.

MRS. RAFAEL-KEATS. [*Splendid, distinguished, literary, carries a lorgnette—comes forward, and* MRS. PLATO-DARWIN *retires.*] Tut, tut! All very learned [*Indicating* MRS. PLATO-DARWIN.] and very amiable, [*Indicating the other visitors.*] but *I* say to you, Lucy, be an individualist. Why merge yourself in others' reforms, philanthropies, education or philosophy? Why not emerge?

LUCY. But how? What would you have me do?

MRS. RAFAEL-KEATS. Talent is latent; discover yours! If nothing else [*MRS. KEATS bends impressively towards* LUCY.]—become a *writer*!

LUCY. An author! But I have never tried to write.

MRS. RAFAEL-KEATS. Why not? Every one does.

LUCY. But I may not have the gift.

MRS. RAFAEL-KEATS. It may develop; [*Enthusing.*] we will develop it! Join our *Class in Literature*! Come this very evening to the public reading of our monthly output! There you shall awaken to your own possibilities.

LUCY. O, I thank you, but John and I have an engagement to stay at home; I have [*Lucy looks ruefully at her desk.*]—I have to address some announcement cards. You see I am already secretary of one organization.

MRS. RAFAEL-KEATS. Lucy! Why dribble out your time in addressing post cards, or in cosying your husband by the fire? Why not begin at once to develop your *own life work*? [*LUCY appears much interested and* MRS. RAFAEL-KEATS *is encouraged.*] What would it not mean to you, month by month, to see your name in the literary reviews: "Mrs. Lucy Potts, the dainty lyrist, has in this month's issue of the Pacific"—

KETTLE. Hoot!

LUCY. Why, Mrs. Keats, I never wrote a line of poetry in my life! I do not know one rule of versification!

MRS. RAFAEL-KEATS. Rules! Quite obsolete, quite senseless! Modern poetry knows no rules! [*Abruptly.*] Lucy, have you a color sense?

LUCY. I can tell red from green.

MRS. RAFAEL-KEATS. [*Delightedly.*] Oh, charming! A color sense is more necessary to poets than is a sense of right and wrong!

KETTLE. Hoot!

LUCY. Can it be that you are serious?

MRS. RAFAEL-KEATS. Entirely serious, it is the truth. Color sense is the aeroplane with which one mounts to the dizziest height of modern art. Color is Pegasus,—Pegasus is Color!

LUCY. This is too strange!

MRS. MEANWELL. [*Aside.*] Stuff and nonsense!

MRS. RAFAEL-KEATS. Lucy dear, you know that *red* is a force-producing power—the very flame of inspiration! You know that *violet* is enervating that *green* is subtle, temperamental. Now, if, under the spectrum's mystic tutelage, your emotions express themselves in cool greys, in black and white design, in gleams of gold, in sociological drabs and browns, then, then you have arrived, you are achieving modern poetry!

KETTLE. Hoot!

MRS. RAFAEL-KEATS. What an ill-mannered kettle!

LUCY. I fear my kettle has no color sense.

MRS. RAFAEL-KEATS. Really my dear, you have no idea how easy is authorship! Any one writes a play nowadays and gets it on the boards! And literature is so remunerative!

LUCY. Is it?

MRS. RAFAEL-KEATS. Yes, you could have economic freedom in the literary life. Many of us began our successful careers by writing the Bright Sayings of Children

for the Daily Forum! A dollar each, you know! You have read them, those Bright Sayings?

LUCY. [*With an inclusive gesture.*] Dear friends, how kind you are, and interested in my future!

[*The KETTLE sings softly.*]

LUCY. I feel within me a stirring towards you all—towards your Reform, dear Mrs. Meanwell; towards your Philanthropy, dear Mrs. Ade; toward Education and Philosophy—how much I need them both!—[*To MISS SCHOOLCRAFT and MRS. DARWIN.*] and towards your literary life, dear Mrs. Keats. I should like to do everything you ask of me.

KETTLE. [*Very loud.*] Hoot, toot-toot-toot!

[*All the women cover their ears.*]

MRS. MEANWELL. There! What is that wretched sound? I have heard [*Pause.*] many strange sounds in this room.

LUCY. It is my kettle, anxious for fear of my forgetting my own ideal.

MISS SCHOOLCRAFT. You have an ideal then?

LUCY. I have; I have already tried to express it; it is as elusive as a humming bird.

MRS. RAFAEL-KEATS. But you must know what it is. [*The KETTLE sings softly.*]

LUCY. It is—what *every* woman wants.

MISS SCHOOLCRAFT. Why make a mystery of it?

LUCY. [*Timidly.*] It is—I want to keep a little time every day for myself—for my home!

MRS. MEANWELL. [*Groans.*] I feared we had come too late! Too late! [*To LUCY.*] What a trite ideal?

LUCY. [*Very earnestly.*] No, not trite! Do let me explain. [*The visitors, except MRS. ADE, are preparing to leave.*]

MRS. ADE. [*Kindly.*] Go on, Lucy, explain. Perhaps you have something less commonplace to say to us. [*The other visitors also listen indulgently.*]

LUCY. [*Slowly, as if trying to formulate her ideas.*] You know my grandmother was a famous housekeeper.

She cooked and sewed and brewed and spun and reared twelve children and wore herself to early caps and knitting, a premature old age, by too much labor done within her home, and not enough of contact with the world.

MRS. MEANWELL. Exactly!

LUCY. [*Pauses.*] You are interested? [*All assent.*]

MRS. DARWIN. Proceed.

LUCY. My mother's life is equally as toilsome. In clubs and in committees, on Boards of many excellent institutions, she tries, with watchfulness and wise provision, to guard the helpless and uphold the weak. She is so busied that she has no time at home, and I know she sometimes envies grandmother her less complex, if more laborious, life.

MRS. RAFAEL-KEATS. Well, well, what next?

LUCY. You know my Aunt has made a brilliant record. She is a spinster, but her mind is married to the law. She has, in a marked degree, succeeded in her profession, but yet she claims her life is incomplete because she has no home life and no children.

MRS. DARWIN. [*Patronizingly.*] Incontestably these are all varied feminine types.

LUCY. One more type: Cousin Mary Jones. She is—just wealthy. It doesn't seem to me she *lives* her life; she tats—on hotel porches—and travels when she wants to change her mind! And yet Cousin Mary has her body in wonderful condition; she sleeps and eats as normal beings should. [*Lucy brightens.*] I mean to be these women all in one, or parts of each. I mean to make a home and find my balance between myself, my home and outside demands. The kettle tells me that it can be done. [*LUCY waits; the other women look at her in amazement; LUCY says gently.*] That, then, is my ideal—mine and my Kettle's.

MRS. MEANWELL. Your Kettle's! [*She makes her way to the controlophone.*]

MRS. DARWIN. Here is indubitably psychic perversion.

MRS. RAFAEL-KEATS. That a woman of our day should trust her Kettle! What a subject for a comedy!

MRS. MEANWELL. [*Through controlophone.*] Loop 5000.

TELEPHONE VOICE. 5000 Loop.

ANOTHER TELEPHONE VOICE. This is Loop 5000.

MRS. MEANWELL. The Psychopathic Institute?

TELEPHONE VOICE. Yes; what is wanted?

MRS. MEANWELL. Send an expert at once to 1630 Cherryblossom, 1st Apartment. [*LUCY starts to protest.*]

LUCY. Mrs. Meanwell!

MRS. MEANWELL. [*Telephoning.*] I say the 1st Apartment. There is a case here of unusual interest.

LUCY. But Mrs. Meanwell!

[*MRS. MEANWELL holds LUCY off with her left hand till MRS. KEATS and MISS SCHOOLCRAFT gently pull LUCY away.*]

TELEPHONE VOICE. Who is reporting the case?

MRS. MEANWELL. Mrs. Martha Meanwell.

TELEPHONE VOICE. There at once.

[*Door bell—maid attends.*]

LUCY. [*Struggling.*] But what are you doing?

MRS. MEANWELL. My poor, dear Lucy! As your mother's oldest friend I feel myself in duty bound to do this. Were she but here! [*Enter MRS. BLACK unobserved by the others.*] O, that all your brilliant early promise should end in this peculiar kind of madness! [*MRS. MEANWELL clasps her hands, agonized. She turns to MISS SCHOOLCRAFT.*] We must not leave her, Felicia, till relief comes.

MRS. BLACK. [*Coming forward quietly.*] May I relieve you, Martha?

MRS. MEANWELL and the others:—Mary Black!

LUCY. [*Joyously springing towards her mother.*] Mother!

MRS. MEANWELL. Mary, this is a sad, sad sight for you. I would have spared you. I love dear Lucy almost

as my own. She is the victim of hallucination—she fancies she is possessed by her own kettle. You understand the possible meaning of this?

MRS. BLACK. [*Calmly.*] I think I do.

MRS. MEANWELL. You have always shown yourself brave in every emergency, Mary; be brave now. I have called a psychopath—he will soon be here. Shall we stay with you or would you prefer to be alone with Lucy?

MRS. BLACK. I am not afraid to be alone—with Lucy.

LUCY. Mother!

MRS. RAFAEL-KEATS. I really should be going.

MRS. DARWIN and MRS. ADE. [*Looking at their wrist watches and comparing notes.*] We have engagements.

MISS SCHOOLCRAFT. The School Board meets this afternoon. I must be there.

MRS. MEANWELL. I will go, then, Mary. But—you will find me at headquarters if you need me.

[*Exeunt the 5 visitors.*]

LUCY. Mother, you understand me?

MRS. BLACK. I understand you dear, perfectly.

JOHN. [*Enters hurried and anxious.*] Lucy, what is wrong? Mother, what is it? A motor ambulance is at the door and some one from the Psychopathic Institute insists there is in our apartment an urgent case requiring his attention. I staved him off to come myself and find out what it meant.

LUCY. [*Mischievously.*] It is the Kettle, dear.

JOHN. Do be serious, Lucy! You tell me, Mother!

MRS. BLACK. Whatever it is, John, I will be responsible. You can send the doctors away on my authority.

JOHN. Things are a trifle mixed here, but I cheerfully send away the invaders. [*Exit.*]

[*The KETTLE sings. LUCY, prettily putting her mother into an easy chair, kneels beside her.*]

LUCY. O mother, you did come just in time!

MRS. BLACK. I tried to telephone you, earlier, that I was coming, but I was told [*She laughs.*] your telephone hours were 8 to 9, and 5 to 6!

LUCY. [*Horried.*] And that was *you*, Mother dear, whom Mrs. Meanwell regulated!

MRS. BLACK. I thought her idea a splendid one.

[*Re-enter JOHN.*]

LUCY. [*To JOHN.*] Come here, dear, let Mother tell you what it was all about and I will make arrangements for our dinner. [*JOHN seats himself beside MRS. BLACK while LUCY manipulates buttons and starts the maid who proceeds to lay the cloth for three.*]

JOHN. [*To MRS. BLACK.*] What was the trouble, Mother?

MRS. BLACK. From what I saw and heard, and more that I infer, it seems that Martha Meanwell and other progressive women insisted that Lucy acquiesce in their plans for her. Lucy set forth her own ideas and fell back upon the kettle for support. The women judged her obviously mad.

JOHN. And they sent for the psychopaths?

LUCY. [*Coming forward.*] And mother came in just the nick of time! [*LUCY caresses her mother's hand and turns to JOHN.*]

LUCY. John dear, I don't like to bother you, but—

JOHN. Those were the very words you used this morning that got me in for managing the maid. What is it this time?

LUCY. Those postals!

JOHN. Sure enough, I had forgotten. Well, let's get at them. [*To MRS. BLACK.*] Will Mother excuse us? Lucy has had seven hundred postals to turn out today. [*LUCY arranges JOHN at the desk.*]

MRS. BLACK. [*Resting back in her chair.*] I shall be glad to sit here quietly and watch you two.

[*Telephone rings.*]

JOHN. [*Through controlophone.*] Home 123.

TELEPHONE VOICE. Mrs. Potts there?

JOHN. Yes; may I take the message?

TELEPHONE VOICE. This is the Dunetrotters' office. We learn through Government sources that the weather next week is prognosticated unfavorably and have therefore decided not to hold the large meeting for which Mrs. Potts was sending out notices. Have the postals been mailed?

JOHN. [*Explosively.*] No!

TELEPHONE VOICE. Very well then, please destroy them. Sorry if we have troubled Mrs. Potts unnecessarily. Goodbye.

JOHN. [*Angrily putting down the controlophone.*] Well of all—impositions! This is the climax. Lucy, I hope you will at once resign as Secretary of that organization!

LUCY. John, never mind. I don't mind. I have had a great experience day.

JOHN. A great experience day!

LUCY. Yes, the kind of interrupted, over-busy, higgledy-piggledy day most modern women live from Monday morning until Saturday night, week in, week out. [*LUCY turns to MRS. BLACK.*] Mother dear, the kettle is helping me as you said it would.

MRS. BLACK. It speaks clearly to you?

LUCY. Yes, I think I understand both what it says to me and to every woman. [*Appealing to MRS. BLACK and JOHN.*] You both hear, don't you, what the kettle sings? I think it says:

[*LUCY intones the following lines while the kettle sings softly:*]

"Oh, Modern Woman, restless, uneasy, struggling to adjust yourself to great changes that are in process of re-making human society;

"Oh, Woman, conservator of life, I, your Kettle, say to you: 'No matter how well you may succeed in professions, in industry, in politics—and you shall succeed—always and forever you shall in your heart of heart de-

sire, and struggle to maintain your home; and always and forever I, your Kettle, will give you good advice.”

[LUCY stops abruptly; so does the KETTLE. LUCY looks apologetically at MRS. BLACK and JOHN.] Now you will think me quite gone off my head!

MRS. BLACK. No, dear, I am glad your kettle speaks as it does to you. Many women fail to understand it.

LUCY. It is your good gift to me, mother.

JOHN. I like the homey sound of the kettle myself.

MRS. BLACK. Men need its message too.

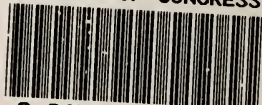
JOHN. [To LUCY.] And so you would say to all distracted women—[JOHN waits for LUCY's answer; LUCY joins JOHN and MRS. BLACK in a group that reveals the KETTLE in the background, singing softly.]

LUCY. I'd say to every woman that I know:

“Be sure your kettle sings.”

* * * * *

CURTAIN.



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